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Dear Friends and Colleagues of Sylvia Meagher:

This little booklet was conceived by two of Sylvia Meagher's closest girlfriends, Bunny Heller and Anne Silberling. It is their tribute to our friend and associate as much as mine. It was printed without charge by a man who never knew Sylvia, so impressed was he by her unique personality.

As her family wished, attendance at the Walter B. Cooke Funeral Home on West 72nd Street in Manhattan was limited to those closest to Sylvia. Two days before the service, her niece asked me to speak. Although I was deeply shaken, I somehow managed to prepare these remarks. Mindful that the gathering would be small, intimate and mainly comprised of people not involved in studying the JFK assassination, I nevertheless felt it imperative that one who had worked with Sylvia stand up at that moment and address her deepest concerns.

When Bunny and Anne asked to do this booklet, I decided not to alter the style or syntax of my reading copy; the eulogy therefore appears here as it was originally written and spoken. There have been -- and will undoubtedly continue to be -- other tributes to Sylvia Meagher, as well as more clinical appraisals of her work. We wanted to share this simple, very personal overview with those who knew her.

Sincerely yours,

Roger B. Feinman

Roger Bruce Feinman

Sylvia Meagher

July 22, 1921 - January 14, 1989

A Eulogy
by
Roger Bruce Feinman

A EULOGY FOR SYLVIA MEAGHER

Delivered on January 16, 1989 in New York City

Members of Sylvia's family, and friends, my name is Roger Feinman. I first met Sylvia Meagher many years ago while I was working in journalism and she was working at the U.N. At our first encounter, I regarded her with that degree of detachment and skepticism which were required of those who worked in my field. I feel that she regarded me at first in much the same way, if only because I was working at the time for CBS News, which was not among her favorite news media.

But all that quickly dissipated. Soon, my longtime interest in the assassination of President Kennedy, and my understanding of what journalism was supposed to be about, brought me to the point of making some difficult decisions which would affect the course of my career. Sylvia helped me to face those decisions and to see them very clearly. She saw me through the darkest periods of my life with unswerving loyalty. And over the years, our friendship transcended by far our mutual interest in the assassination, and there grew between us a very rare, special, close bond which fills my heart at this moment. She was my very best friend, and I loved her.

So, I am both honored and grateful that the family has asked me to speak with you today. I hope that you will bear with me, and that she will forgive me, if I should falter as I try to convey to you my thoughts and feelings at this difficult moment.

Love; compassion; generosity; integrity -- *unfailing, uncompromising* integrity; an unwillingness to abide any sort of hypocrisy; a thirst for knowledge; and, a fierce devotion to the discovery of truth. These were just some of the qual-

ities which imbued the life of Sylvia Meagher, a life which we celebrate, a loss which we cannot now fully fathom, except for the immediate painful awareness that there is suddenly gone from our midst a truly remarkable woman.

Long before the term "women's liberation" came into vogue, Sylvia Meagher quietly blazed her own trail, and she enjoyed a long, meaningful, successful career at the United Nations World Health Organization. It was a career which afforded her dignity, comfort, and the opportunity to hone the research and writing skills which later would elevate her most important work to the level of immortality.

Some people regard their approaching retirement with fear and trepidation. They don't know how they will manage to adjust to a life without work at its core. Sylvia did not have such reservations. She felt that she had worked long, loyally and hard, and that she was entitled to a long period of peace and quiet contemplation. Besides, she had other passions to preoccupy her in retirement, and I would like to speak for a few minutes about the very passionate nature of this woman.

First and foremost, Sylvia had a passion for her family.

She loved her family very, very much. She spoke of them frequently, and always with the most loving concern for their happiness and well-being. She used to joke, with that delicious wit we all knew, that she invited members of her family to visit her at Fire Island only so that she could put them to work, stocking the cupboard and cleaning the house. I knew better, and so did they. She mentioned to me more than once that the main reason she used to rent a summer house at Fire Island was to entertain and visit more intensively with her family and close friends, in a way that she was unable to do at her apartment in Manhattan.

I am pleased that I met some of you during those very happy days in Sylvia's life at Fire Island. All of you were always uppermost in her mind. You have my most sorrowful condolences in this time of your bereavement.

Sylvia had a passion for her friends.

She was capable of praising her friends when she felt that they were deserving of praise, but she was equally capable of leveling the most penetrating and withering criticisms toward them when she felt it necessary. But she was never wrong, and she was never less than compassionate and caring.

Many of us knew her generous spirit, which sustained us in times of personal crises.

Sylvia, quite remarkably, had friendships which spanned across generations, as well as continents. She delighted in the company of her friends Anne, Bunny, and Lenore, but she also attracted many people who were much younger than she, and the attraction was mutual.

I think that Sylvia touched us all in much the same way: We were fascinated by the speed and breadth of her intellect. We were often rendered helpless with laughter by her sense of humor. And always, we were awestruck to be in the presence of a woman who had made a difference in our country, as well as in our lives.

It is a sign of her concern for her friends that Sylvia kept from many of them the full extent of the physical ills which weakened her in recent months.

I must make reference to that group of her friends whom I know only as her poker group. We have not met, but Sylvia spoke about you, and you should

know that your gatherings gave her much comfort and pleasure during her last years.

I would be seriously remiss if I did not mention Sylvia's passion for her two cats, Mimi and Irini. She lavished them with love and affection, which they richly returned to her. They were her children, and she gave them perfect lives.

In recent years, as the eldest cat, Mimi, became increasingly frail with age, Sylvia anticipated with a sense of dread and anxiety the inevitable day when she would have to part with her faithful companion. Those of us who loved Sylvia, though we grieve for her today, must be grateful that she was spared that terrible pain. But I am certain that she would have overcome and survived that adversity as she did so many others.

Sylvia had a passion for the ballet.

During her final years, when it became physically too strenuous for her to attend the ballet as she used to do, she derived great pleasure from being able to watch at home on Cable-TV. And perhaps her greatest joy during the last year and one-half was something quite simple, really: Her nieces gave Sylvia her first videocassette recorder, which enabled her to watch her favorite ballets over and over to her heart's content. Although there was only a short time remaining to her, she managed to amass an impressive collection of ballet tapes, in addition to tapes of the ice-skating from the recent Olympic Games, which she enjoyed tremendously. Perhaps she was drawn to these arts because of the great precision they require, a possible reflection of the workings of her own mind.

Sylvia was passionate about baseball, and particularly about *her* New York Mets. Many of us knew the basic rule: if the Mets were on television, we were not

to call her. I inadvertently broke that rule a few times, but she forgave me. She devoted the same rapt attention to tennis.

She was a voracious reader of books and periodicals.

This woman, who would admit only with the greatest reluctance that she never had a college education, nevertheless could hold her own in any conversation, with anyone, on almost any subject. And if there was a subject she knew nothing about, she was not embarrassed to ask, and her mind would quickly absorb the essential points.

If I were to stop at this point, I know that you would agree with me that Sylvia Meagher had a successful and fulfilling life by ordinary standards. But, as we all know, there was another passion which stirred deep within Sylvia and which never waned -- not even during her final illness (and I talked with her just last week).

I speak, of course, of her passion for justice and truth, which she invested so heavily in her work on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

This is neither the time nor the place to discuss with you the technical merits of Sylvia's cause -- our cause. Instead, my purpose is to further define the passion, commitment and conscience which permeated the heart and soul of Sylvia Meagher.

There is now an atmosphere of cynicism and resignation in many corners of society. We have suffered for many years from a vacuum of inspired, committed, creative, imaginative leadership at the very highest levels of government. And in that void we have also witnessed the smug complacency of those who continue to rape our economy and our environment.

It is well, therefore, to remember Sylvia's life as a candle which illuminated for us something that the Kennedys themselves said repeatedly, that an individual can make a difference. We can be greater than ourselves. Once we have attained the basic necessities of life, it is within all of us to make the choice whether to step beyond our mundane concerns in a way that affects society, and even the course of history.

Sylvia did not hesitate in making her choice to commit her energies to something larger than herself.

We should bear in mind the temporal context within which Sylvia began her twenty-five years of study, writing, speaking and thinking about this tragic event. In the mid-1960's, memories of the Joseph McCarthy era were still raw; the wounds which were inflicted during that period had not yet fully healed. Throughout the country, there was debate whether it was legitimate or whether it was disloyal to dissent from government pronouncements and policies.

As the result of an experience in her job, Sylvia was well-prepared to travel the often lonely road through this milieu. Although she was a true patriot, she could never understand why she should have to sign a loyalty oath in order to continue working for an international body dedicated to the betterment of all mankind, the United Nations World Health Organization. In successfully resisting such a requirement, she became acquainted at first hand with forces who were prone to resort to empty rhetoric, and even very much intimidation, when they could not refute her logic.

At the time tragedy struck on November 22, 1963, Sylvia had admiration for Kennedy's elegance, grace, wit and articulation, but she did not idolize the man. She was too sophisticated for that.

She detected almost immediately that the massive machinery of power had begun to close the doors on any thorough, honest inquiry into the event, and that this machinery was also moving just as quickly to seal a verdict of guilt against a young man who was helpless to defend himself. This struck a responsive chord within Sylvia which later found its expression in the dedication of her book:

> "This book is dedicated to the innocent victims of a society which often inflicts indignity, imprisonment, and even death on the obscure and helpless."

Her first major work on this case was the creation of her Subject Index. Now, just think about this: In November 1964, two months after the Warren Commission disbanded, the government published 26 volumes of hearings and exhibits which purportedly substantiated the Commission's Report. To be precise, there were 15 volumes of testimony, and 11 volumes of exhibits. Sylvia immediately obtained one of the relatively few sets that were printed and was shocked by what she found. These materials were disheveled and disorganized. There was no comprehensive index of these volumes. There was no way for a serious researcher to correlate the material contained in the volumes with the text of the Report itself.

And during that period of time before we ever heard of personal computers or wordprocessors capable of automating this type of work, Sylvia took it upon herself to single-handedly index these volumes, armed with nothing more than pen, pencil and an assortment of paper. Remember, too, that during this period she was working full-time at the United Nations. She would rush home and toil long into the night, night-after-night, for a full year to produce this little volume, which was published in March 1966.

Thanks to Sylvia, we have this indispensable research tool. You cannot study this case unless you begin with the Report and its accompanying volumes, and you cannot deal with that material without Sylvia's index. It is that simple.

The same chord which resounded within Sylvia was also heard by others. A unique, informal network of concerned citizens began to form, and as Sylvia discovered that there were others who shared her concerns, her telephone line and her apartment gradually became the hub of this network.

I think of the movie, Close Encounters of the Third Kind, for which Sylvia cared very little despite her serious consideration of extraterrestrial phenomena. But you may recall that several characters in the movie were inexplicably drawn to the same desert location in the Southwest at the same time, because they somehow knew that something very important had happened in the world, and that something even more important was soon to change their lives. So too, these early critics came to know and seek comfort with one another as they exchanged their information. They would never become a "movement" in the sense of the civil rights or antiwar movements of the Sixties, and many of the original participants in this network have long ago left its ranks, but it survives (although without Sylvia, it remains to be seen for how long).

As her index grew throughout 1965, so did Sylvia's knowledge and expertise in this case. There was a time when she could cite to you volume and page number without cracking open the book.

She also began to show her cogent and incisive style of writing with articles on the case which appeared in such publications as The Minority of One, The Texas Observer, Esquire, and others.

Those were heady days for Sylvia. Most of us recall the rising expectations of the Sixties. In our own way, many of us were convinced that we could change the world.

She pursued her goal of bringing about a reopening of the case without fear, although this was the era of J. Edgar Hoover's tyrannical rule over the FBI, and the egregious misuse of its powers which has been fully documented during recent years. She never cared to know if her phone was tapped; they could listen in if they wanted to. She wasn't interested in seeing whatever files the government may have kept on her.

Students of the assassination knew that they could trust Sylvia implicitly with their confidences. On the other hand, she unselfishly shared her findings and her research, and she was unstinting with the help that she gave to other researchers. I know that Sylvia would wish me to be discreet in discussing this with you, so I will not mention the names, but there are some authors of books which came to early prominence in this case who owe to Sylvia a great intellectual debt for her research and her counsel, debts which have never been fully or rightfully acknowledged. While some adopted her work product as their own, however, they could never duplicate her fire or her cogency, her ability to crystallize the essentials of an argument or an issue, and then to illuminate it through the evidence.

In time, she issued her own masterwork: Accessories After the Fact.

The book has been universally acknowledged -- then as now -- to be the most scrupulously accurate, the best written, and the most definitive treatise on the work of the Warren Commission.

The technique of the book was deceptively simple. She looked at what the Warren Report said. Then she examined the evidence. By comparing the two,

she compiled a catalog of misrepresentations or one-sided interpretations of evidence, inaccuracies, discrepancies, contradictions, obfuscations, omissions and deliberate distortions.

Here is how she explained to her readers what she had done:

> This book examines the correlation, or lack of correlation, between the Report on the one hand and the Hearings and Exhibits on the other. The first pronounces Oswald guilty; the second, instead of corroborating the verdict reached by the Warren Commission, creates a reasonable doubt of Oswald's guilt and even a powerful presumption of his complete innocence of all the crimes of which he was accused.

In her book, Accessories, Sylvia correctly noted that there was a rising chorus of public opinion in late 1966 and 1967 which called for a new investigation of the assassination. She took pride in having helped to bring about this new climate. She did not foresee that it was about to be poisoned, neither did she anticipate the sorrow and aggravation which was about to befall her because she was faithful to her principles and her conscience.

The District Attorney of New Orleans had announced his intention to prosecute a defendant on charges of conspiring to kill President Kennedy. Like a flock of birds, many of Sylvia's associates landed in New Orleans and immediately offered their consulting services to the District Attorney's office, as well as to any member of the press corps who would lend a willing ear. In their high expectations, their faith was blind.

Through all of this, Sylvia stood back, casting her cool, skeptical eyes on the situation. She went back to the evidence, examined the underlying basis of Garrison's case, and here is what she wrote in June 1967 as an afterword to her book:

> But as the Garrison investigation continued to unfold, it gave cause for increasingly serious misgivings about the validity of his evidence, the credibility of his witnesses, and the scrupulousness of his methods.

> The fact that many critics of the Warren Report have remained passionate advocates of the Garrison investigation, even condoning tactics which they might not condone on the part of others, is a matter for regret and disappointment. Nothing less than strict factual accuracy and absolute moral integrity must be deemed permissible, if justice is, indeed, to be served.

Sylvia publicly disassociated herself and her work from the Garrison sideshow. And many of her closest colleagues abandoned her, and they never forgave her.

But Sylvia never waivered from her conviction that she had been true to herself and her work, and that her decision was correct.

In time, and with some difficulty, Sylvia ultimately recognized the unfortunate fact that she and her colleagues in the early days of the case had opened a Pandora's box. In the face of official intransigence and the news media's unpardonable default, some people became infected by the infuriating ambiguities and uncertainties of this case to the point that it disturbed their natural balance and enveloped them completely. She saw others succumb to the temptation to invent solutions or -- as we saw in the Garrison affair -- to latch onto the seductive solutions advanced by others, though they lacked the hard evidence to support their often convoluted theories. Moreover, some activists seemed motivated more by their political leanings, or by the pursuit of fame and fortune, or perhaps a little of both, than by pursuit of the truth.

For these reasons, among others, Sylvia continued to refrain from publicly associating herself with any particular interest group, or from endorsing any particular theory. She preferred to trust her own impeccable instincts, and to safeguard the integrity of her own work on the case.

This posture endeared her only to those who properly grasped the essence of her work. It alienated those who were eager to capitalize on her name and reputation to suit their own ends.

Sylvia did not style herself as an investigator; she doubted very seriously that a private citizen could truly investigate this case. What kind of precedent would that create? Should private citizens have to do the work of the government or the news media? Neither was she interested in pursuing theories, just the facts.

Not that she didn't have strong suspicions. We discussed this matter over the years and arrived at what we felt was a close approximation of the truth. But I will not betray her trust and confidence, because she felt that if one were to speak or write publicly on an issue of such importance, one must be armed with the facts. Innuendo and insinuation were not her style.

In Sylvia's view, it was the proper role of the critics to ask questions; it was for the government to answer them.

Sylvia referred to herself either as a critic of the Warren Commission or as a student of the assassination. She struggled throughout the course of her work on the case to resist having other labels pinned on her.

Don't tell us that we have some kind of psychological need or inclination toward grandiose conspiratorial explanations for this tragedy.

Please, don't call us conspiracy theorists; don't make us out to be oddballs.

Just answer the questions which Sylvia posed in her book!

My friends, I say to you that the challenges which Sylvia Meagher posed to the Government of the United States have gone unanswered. Her detractors

could never attack her work. But just try to count the number of hoops that they have had to jump through in their efforts to explain, excuse or exonerate the Warren Commission.

Sylvia never retreated from her principles, but she did reduce her public activities. Notwithstanding that some of her former colleagues were unable to let their lives go on, Sylvia was content that she had done her part, and although some of us who knew her urged her to continue to speak and write, it cannot be denied that she did more than an individual could reasonably be expected to do.

Professor G. Robert Blakey, Chief Counsel to the House Select Committee on Assassinations, invited her to participate in a colloquium of critics early in that body's investigation. She did so only with the greatest personal reservations.

When the committee issued its findings, she was privately very critical of its work, including its omission of a comprehensive index. She immediately followed her natural inclination to begin indexing the House Select Committee's volumes, but this time she was not alone. With the help of a group of Canadian students and their professor, she produced her Master Index to the JFK Assassination Investigations. With that final accomplishment, Sylvia found herself lacking the energy or motivation to duplicate the feat she had performed with Accessories After The Fact.

She continued to receive many invitations to appear on radio and television. Most of these were graciously declined. She kept receiving letters and telephone calls from students, journalists, documentary-makers, and budding writers.

She encouraged the curious to pursue their researches, because she conceived the possibility that there would one day be a break in the case, but she was largely resigned to the notion that it would be for history to make the final

judgment. She was confident that history would confirm her belief that Oswald was innocent of all the crimes of which he had been accused. She was equally confident that her work would survive intact.

We were both astonished at the outpouring of articles and broadcasts and public sentiment which marked the 25th anniversary. Sylvia was particularly impressed by the Chip Selby documentary, with its clear, factual, methodical demolition of the single-bullet-theory which is at the heart of the lone assassin thesis. She lamented that a work such as this could not have been seen by the public twenty years ago, but she hoped that Selby's film would receive a wide audience.

She left no unfinished manuscripts, no unfulfilled ambition. Her life was complete, her mission fulfilled. She had made her case.

Her work has not been refuted. Her work has stood the test of time. It will be sought after and recognized for decades to come. It will be studied by future historians, not only for its tremendous informative value, but as a symptom of the loss of vitality -- not in our democratic ideals, but in the institutions which should nourish and foster them. No student or journalist or future historian will be able to properly study this case unless they begin at the beginning, with the Warren Report and its accompanying volumes. And no one can do that without having on their desk Sylvia's indices and her book to help them cope with the daunting task of navigating through the vast array of literature which has been published on the case. Sylvia's legacy will serve as a beacon to those of us who will continue to follow her lead.

Now, however, we must part company with this woman of conscience, this woman of passion.

Her book contains her own epitaph:

> The country owes profound gratitude to the critics and researchers whose work, published or unpublished, has helped to destroy the myth of the Warren Report. Because of their courage, intelligence and integrity, "it is the majestic Warren Commission itself that is on the dock today, rather than the lonely Oswald," as Anthony Howard wrote in the London Observer on August 7, 1966. The Commission must receive justice -- that justice which was denied to Oswald in death as in life -- but nothing less than justice.

The country does owe Sylvia profound gratitude. But I hope you will forgive me a selfish, self-indulgent, personal note: I cannot yet clearly comprehend her place in history. I only know, as I told you, that I have lost my very best friend. She was the brightest person I have ever known. She saw me through the darkest of times, as well as better times. She never demanded anything from her friends but that we recognize the best within ourselves. She had a greater faith in me than I had in myself. I loved her.

Now she is at peace with God, and I am certain that I know what her first question was. I can't stand not knowing the answer. But now that Sylvia finally knows, I hope that she has been reunited with her beloved friend, Elaine. And someday it is my faith and my prayer that we will meet again at that last conclave of the critics, so that we may congratulate Sylvia and ourselves on a job well done.

Rest well, Sylvia.

---Roger Bruce Feinman

Sylvia Meagher
July 22, 1921 - January 14, 1989

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